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## GEORGIA CLOSES OYSTER HARVEST IN STATE WATERS

**Brunswick, GA (May 17, 2011)** – Georgia Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Commissioner Mark Williams has announced that Georgia's territorial waters will close to commercial and recreational oyster harvest effective 6:00 a.m., Wednesday, June 1, 2011 through midnight on Friday, September 30, 2011. A similar closure was made in 2010 to meet the requirements of Georgia's *Vibrio parahaemolyticus* (Vp) control plan.

According to Dominic Guadagnoli, State Shellfish Program Manager for the DNR, "This closure ensures that Georgia meets new requirements of the National Shellfish Sanitation Program to protect public health by implementing a Vp control plan." Vp is naturally occurring bacteria found in filter-feeding shellfish. It occurs at higher concentrations during the months of the year when water temperatures are warm.

"During the months of June through September, estuarine water temperatures usually exceed 81 degrees Fahrenheit. This is a threshold temperature established by the National Shellfish Sanitation Program for determining risk associated with Vp. Since coastal Georgia water temperatures meet or exceed this threshold, DNR is implementing a Vp Management Control Plan," Guadagnoli explained. Other South Atlantic states will also be implementing similar controls to address their specific Vp management issues.

Summer is spawning season for oysters. This combination of reproductive activity and warm water affects the quality of oyster flesh making them less desirable as seafood during this time of year. The period of May through September accounts for less than two percent of Georgia's annual reported oyster harvest. Most recreational harvesters likewise refrain from harvesting oysters during the summer. Thus, it is expected that the planned closure will have little adverse impact on traditional oyster harvesting in coastal Georgia.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and the Food and Drug Administration most Vp illness cases due to consumption of raw oysters are under reported. The onset of Vp illness generally occurs within three days and

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common symptoms include vomiting, abdominal cramping, diarrhea, fever and chills. Thorough cooking of oysters and other shellfish will generally destroy all bacteria including Vp.

Commercial oyster harvesters have long been aware of the potential for Vp problems associated with oyster harvest and consumption during the warmer months. They fully support the planned closure according to Guadagnoli, who met with all commercial shellfish leaseholders in April to discuss this issue.

For more information on the Shellfish Closure contact GA DNR/Coastal Resources Division at 912.264.7218.

**Contact:**

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*The Coastal Resources Division of Georgia DNR is the state agency entrusted to manage Georgia's coastal marshes, beaches, waters and fisheries for the benefit of present and future generations. The mission of the Department of Natural Resources is to sustain, enhance, protect and conserve Georgia's natural, historic and cultural resources for present and future generations while recognizing the importance of promoting the development of commerce and industry that utilize sound environmental practices.*